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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006105

SIPDIS

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ITP/MACKE/THOMAS, CMP/DLP/WETZEL
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GENEVA PASS HEALTH ATTACHE

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958:N/A

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SUBJECT: Turkey's AI Outbreak - More Questions

Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet Distribution.

[1](#)1. Summary. Turkey is waiting for the results of tests, which were sent to England to determine the type of Avian Influenza (AI) that was detected in a turkey flock near Balıkesir last week. There is still some uncertainty among officials whether the virus is the H5N1 strain. The outbreak occurred on a private farm, which raised birds on an open field near a large wildlife preserve. The area is also home to many of Turkey's largest commercial poultry operations. End Summary.

Outbreak Near Large Commercial Operations

[1](#)2. (SBU) The outbreak occurred in a village near Balıkesir in the Marmara region. This is a rich agriculture area and home to several of the largest commercial poultry operations in Turkey. According to one large commercial poultry operator, there are about 25 million commercial birds in this region and poultry companies have been concerned about such an outbreak for some time. Specifically, the area has some major wildlife refuges, which, at times during the year, are home to hundreds of species of birds, which migrate from Russia to Africa every year and which could potentially carry AI. On Monday, one private representative reported that the outbreak occurred on a farm where the flocks were kept outdoors and in possible contact with the wild bird population. According to this same representative, about 250 turkeys died the first day of the outbreak with 500 dying the second day. Since that time, all ducks, geese, turkeys and chickens have been culled in a 25 km radius around the village in the hope of containing the outbreak.

Fact or Fiction

[1](#)3. (SBU) This being Turkey, truth and rumor exist simultaneously. Some villagers are contending that the affected flocks were fed in rice fields, which had been sprayed with chemicals. At the same time, commercial poultry producers indicated on Monday that tests on all parent stocks in the area and have thus far not revealed any other contamination. Nonetheless, poultry facilities continue to restrict access to their facilities and have implemented specific biosafety protocols in order to prevent any contamination.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The strain of the virus is still unknown. Several contacts indicated that Turkish officials have sent samples from the affected flock to England for testing since Turkey does not possess any reliable testing facilities for this disease. They hope to have the results of the tests by Tuesday at the latest to determine the strain of Avian Influenza (AI) in the area. One EU official noted that no other cases had been detected and that it was possible that the outbreak was not H5N1.

[1](#)5. (SBU) According to the Dutch Agriculture Attache, a large number of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture in Ankara have been sent to the area. Nonetheless, it appears that much of the responsibility for preventing any new outbreaks will fall on the private sector. One company hired some Australians who were familiar with the outbreaks in Asia to provide training. Most of the large companies Banvit and Seker Pilic have been holding training sessions for all of their contract farmers. During a recent visit to the region, the larger private companies indicated to AgCounselor that they were sharing information on detection and safety procedures with smaller companies unable to

afford training.

16. (SBU) Press reports also noted that the Turkish government promised to reimburse farmers for any flocks, which need to be culled. This is in contrast to previous statements in which GOT officials stated that the government has not budgeted for this type of expense. In the event the government decides not to reimburse farmers, there may be reluctance on the part of private farmers to report small outbreaks. The cost to the GOT could be substantial if any large outbreak does occur.

Comment: Private Sector Responsibility

17. (SBU) Both private and government Turkish officials seem to be taking this outbreak very seriously. It is a good sign that the outbreak was announced quickly and that officials took decisive steps immediately. However, private poultry representatives are very concerned with the government's readiness to address any large-scale outbreak. Although three Turkish ministries are responsible for combating this issue, communications among them seem to be inadequate, particularly after meeting with several ministries. The private sector seems to be bearing most of the responsibility for preventing an outbreak in the commercial sector. Still, it is unclear whether information is being disseminated to small private farmers.

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